

ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
4141 N. Third Street –Phoenix, AZ 85012
Thursday – June 14, 2007

M I N U T E S

Call to Order - The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairman Ellis.

Present

Advisory Commissioners

Webb Ellis, Chairperson
Joe Bibich
Linda Fulkerson
Tom Heaney
Phillip Quochytewa

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Mike Landry, Asst. Deputy Director - Operations
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner
Lee Borgen, Vets' Benefit Counselor
Dave Hampton, Public Affairs Officer

Absent

Tom Dingwall, Vice Chair
Gary Fredricks
Kenneth Yamanouchi

Opening – Chairman Ellis introduced the guests, which included Don Moore, Director of the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center and Steven White (retired law enforcement officer who served with Phillip Quochytewa. The minutes of the May 10, 2007 meeting were approved as distributed.

Correspondence Sent and Received – An invitation was received to attend the Archer-Ragsdale Arizona Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen on 5/24/07. A letter was sent to Donald Moore, Director of VA Medical Center, regarding issues raised at the Region meeting in Payson in March; he was also invited to attend an Advisory Commission meeting. There was also another letter received from the son of a Fiduciary client whose father is no longer under guardianship (since December 2006); the matter is considered closed.

VA Medical Center - Don Moore, Director for the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center (VAMC) attended the meeting to meet the Commissioners and address issues raised at the regional meeting in Payson April 14. He clarified that veterans who wish to go to a clinic other than the one in their catchment area may do so without restriction. If a veteran is being advised differently, Mr. Moore needs to be notified and he will make that correction immediately. However, federal regulations require that veterans be reimbursed for travel to the clinic nearest their home, which may be the real issue at hand.

Director Moore is currently studying which clinics (Community Based Outpatient Clinics) are managed by the Phoenix, Tucson, and Prescott VA Medical Centers. He appreciated the Commission for bringing up this issue and requested feedback from the Commission. He asked that the Commission address the issue of Phoenix-Prescott-Payson-Anthem clinics during its meeting in Prescott in August.

The total number of new patients coming into the VAMC is also significantly lower than expected for the metropolitan Phoenix area. Some of the obstacles discussed follow:

- Perception that veterans are not welcome to use the VAMC if they have other health care coverage (such as TriCare).
- Parking is very inconvenient, especially for disabled persons.
- Significant delays in getting appointments with specialists

Director Moore believes there should be no longer than a 30 day wait for an appointment. He is working on obtaining medical equipment that minimizes the need for vets to go outside the VA for CAT scans, MRIs, mammograms, etc. He is revamping the enrollment system and also working on ideas to make parking easier for patients. Building a partnership with the new med school in Phoenix, he hopes to have a hundred residents working at the VAMC next year. As he recruits staff physicians, he intends to require that they qualify as faculty with the med school (thereby raising the bar for health care providers on staff with the VA).

Director's Report – Mike Landry, ADVS Assistant Deputy Director - Operations, reported the following:

- The Home was re-surveyed by DHS and deemed deficiency-free and was also re-surveyed by the VA . James D. R. "Ritch" Steven is the new administrator with over 20 years of experience as a nursing home administrator. The Home continues to improve the quality of its health care delivery with audits and daily meetings.
- Freedom Plate revenues are steadily growing and are being deposited into the Veterans Donation Fund. Almost \$100,000 has been realized in just the first five months.
- The department will be adding 19 Veterans Benefits Counselors (VBCs) this fiscal year.
 - The agency will have 60 VBC's by the end of the year, the minimum VA requirement for counselors based on the number of Arizona veterans.
 - The goal is to have a VBC available in areas no more than one hour's distance from veterans statewide.
 - Space for VBCs can be secured at little or no cost. Commissioner Bibich found space in both Kingman and Bullhead City for offices. Luke AFB and the National Guard are working with us to offer space. DES is also interested in allowing the agency space for VBCs.
 - Commissioner Quochytewa offered to help identify space within the Hopi Tribal Government, if that would be helpful. Mr. Landry will contact him when plans for placement of VBCs in the area are finalized.
 - Joe Bibich offered to help secure free office space for VBCs in other locations. By letting local politicians know how much federal revenue comes into the community from the presence of veterans, he has been very successful in obtaining free space.
- The department is focusing on outreach as a top priority, especially in rural Arizona.
- Renee Dudden, Chief Financial Officer, is replacing Gary Noviello for that responsibility. She is splitting her time now between the Department of Emergency and Military Affairs (DEMA) and ADVS and was unable to come to the meeting today.
- Greg Sulzer has been hired to run the Fiduciary Services Division (previously the responsibility of Gary Noviello) and will be starting with the agency in a few weeks.
- Dave Hampton has been hired as the Director of Communications and Legislative Affairs:
 - Announced that a military cemetery dating back to 1860 had recently been unearthed in Tucson during a construction excavation. Of approximately 60 bodies buried there, 10 have been identified as early cavalry and infantry soldiers who will be buried with full military ceremonies and marked with headstones of the time at the Sierra Vista cemetery.
- The Northern Arizona Veterans' Cemetery is still moving forward. Mr. Landry will meet with the Corps of Engineers and the key personnel from DEMA later this month to acquire property from Camp Navajo.
- The Tucson state veteran home will be built on land on the campus of the VA Medical Center. The agency will partner with the VA in Tucson to care for vets with traumatic brain injuries.
- The Korean War Memorial has been renovated and Mike Klier can provide further details.
- Enduring Freedom Memorial is moving forward and Joan Sisco can provide further details.
- There still is a need to raise \$600,000 to renovate the USS Arizona memorial in Hawaii.

- Recommendations of the Veterans Task Force are being reviewed and studied by the Veterans Research Council. There are several subcommittees that have been formed to take on specific issues (such as homeless & incarcerated vets, veterans in rural Arizona, etc.).

Mike Klier was unable to attend the meeting because he needed to be at the Stand Down in Window Rock. Acting Director Gen. Gregg Maxon was attending a funeral of a war casualty once under his command.

American Indian Veterans Expo in Tucson - Phillip Quochytewa and Tom Heaney attended the event and both felt it was very successful. Donna Adams did a nice job making printed materials and trinkets available to the 130 registered attendees. The Commission brochures were well received. Lee Borgen, VBC, was in attendance and took photographs. Mona Engler, ADVS Native American Veterans Coordinator, made attendees feel comfortable talking about issues and asking questions.

The VAMC staff there was outstanding and Pepe Mendoza provided excellent leadership and customer service. They did a great job advertising/marketing and had many resources available for the attendees.

Commissioner Quochytewa noted the previous attempts by ADVS to bring the 21 Arizona tribes together. He attributed the gradual fall-off of attendance to these meetings as due to the distances traveled and the high cost of gas. He cited the need for travel reimbursement and overnight lodging in order for tribal representatives to attend meetings designed to organize the Indian veterans. He has asked various casinos about hosting the meetings. A more permanent organization that involves American Indian veterans would be very helpful but it was generally accepted that the organization needed to be organized and led by the Indian Veterans themselves. Funding will have to come from outside sources, perhaps ADVS and/or the Veterans Donation Fund.

Election of the New Chairperson and Vice-Chair in July - Chairman Ellis announced that Vice-Chair Dingwall was interested in running for the Chairperson. Linda Fulkerson is interested in running for Vice-Chair.

Announcements – Joe Bibich received a letter from the Governor thanking him for his service on the Commission. His appointment expires 7/1/07 and he intends to seek re-appointment after taking a year sabbatical. Linda Fulkerson was re-appointed and Chairman Ellis presented her with a congratulations letter. Larry McKim was appointed to replace one vacancy and a letter was mailed to welcome him to the Commission. The second Commissioner was not known at the time of the meeting.

Phoenix Fabulous Fourth - Linda Fulkerson will represent the Advisory Commission at the Fabulous Phoenix Fourth by staffing the booth and talking with attendees that evening. She will coordinate with Chairman Ellis who has done this for several years.

Coalition of Therapists to Provide No-Cost Services to Veterans - Commissioner Fulkerson has been working with a women's counselor at the Vets Center. Since Commissioner Fulkerson never practiced in Arizona, she needs to investigate how to develop a coalition similar to a group in Seattle that coordinates pro bono work for veterans. Retired therapists could volunteer to help Arizona veterans when the coalition has been formed and Arizona requirements are thoroughly understood. She will report back to the Commission.

By August 15, the Department must provide its FY2008-2009 budget recommendations to the Governor for consideration.

Advisory Commission Budget - There isn't a budget for the Advisory Commission and funds have routinely been authorized by the Director from the Veterans Donation Fund. The Commission requested that travel expenses be outlined and a budget for the next fiscal year be developed. Chairman Ellis recommended that the incoming Commission Chair and Vice-chair meet ASAP with the Director and Mrs. Forsberg to address this and other issues. He will make a motion to that effect at the July meeting.

Open Discussion / Call to the Public – Chairman Ellis recognized visitor Stephen White who was introduced by Commissioner Quochytewa. They had served together in law enforcement with the BIA. Mr. White is a member of the Sioux tribe in the Dakotas who is married to a Navajo and lives on the Navajo reservation. He appeared before the Commission to report what he considered to be insulting, demeaning, disrespectful, and altogether discriminatory treatment he had received at the Phoenix VA Medical Center. He cited specifically the travel pay clerk who had caused his name to be flagged in the computer system as being a “potentially dangerous person.” He took up the issue with Cari James, the VA Hospital Minority Veterans Coordinator, who removed the flag from his record. However, Mr. White feels that there may be many other Indian veterans being treated similarly and he asked that the Commission look into the matter. He understands that the Commission deals primarily with state issues but feels that his issues need to somehow be brought to the attention of the VA hospital. Unfortunately its Director, Mr. Moore, had left the Commission meeting prior to Mr. White's appearance. The Commission sympathizes with Mr. White and asked that he provide Mrs. Forsberg with copies of documents he had sent regarding his problems with the VA. He promised to fax them to her later the same day. Once received, the Commission will prepare a letter to Director Moore calling attention to the issues Mr. White has raised.

Commissioner Quochytewa reiterated his discussion about the history of trying to get the Arizona Indian tribes together in an ongoing organization that could address such issues as Mr. White's. Dave Hampton offered the support of his staff member, Mona Engler, the Native American Veteran Coordinator for the ADVS, in getting such an organization formed.

Adjournment – The meeting adjourned at 12:18 p.m. by acclamation. The next regular meeting will be held at 10 a.m. on July 12, 2007 at the Arizona State Veteran Home, 4141 N. Third Street, Phoenix, AZ 85012.